

DRAFT*Arizona Habitat Partnership Committee (HPC) Meeting***DRAFT**
DRAFT Minutes of August 9, 2014 – 9:00 AM
Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) Region 2 Office
Flagstaff, Arizona Game & Fish

Present:

Scott Fischer, AGFD	Erin Butler, AGFD
Brian Wakeling, AGFD	John Tuter, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
J.W. Harris, AZ Game and Fish Commission	Duane Aubuchon, AGFD
Judy Archie	Stephen Williams, AZ State Land Dept.
Amber Munig, AGFD	Glen Dickens, AZ Antelope Foundation
Joe Currie, AGFD	Paul Greer, AGFD
Ed Jahrke, AGFD	Larry Phoenix, AGFD
Tom Mackin, AZ Wildlife Federation	Mike Godwin, AGFD
Ruth Gregory, AGFD	Bob Jacobs, Mule Deer Foundation
John O'Dell, AGFD	Amber Munig, AGFD
Kelly Wolffe-Krauter, AGFD	Roger Gannon, Mule Deer Foundation
Anne Thomas, Tonto National Forest	Brent Peterson, Mule Deer Foundation
Dennis Fogle, AGFD	Jessica Gist, AGFD
Dave Daniels, AGFD	Chip Young, AGFD
Steve Clark, AZ Elk Society	Rana Tucker, AGFD
Darren Tucker, AGFD	Kim Kreuzer, AZ Wildlife Federation
Steve Rosenstock, AGFD	Ron Huddleston, AZ Elk Society

Introductions:

Habitat Partnership Committee Chairman, Commissioner J.W. Harris welcomed every one and thanked them for their participation. Brian Wakeling announced that he is retiring from the AGFD at the end of the month. He then introduced Dennis Fogle, who was recently hired to replace the former HPC Coordinator, Reuben Terán, who left the agency this past April. Dennis begins his new job as HPC Coordinator effective August 16, 2014.

Roll Call of Local HPCs:

Forage Resource Study Group – Stephen Williams	Sierra Vista-Douglas HPC – Glen Dickens
AZ Strip Habitat Working Group - Steve Rosenstock	Southwest HPC – Scott Fischer
Kingman HPC - Erin Butler	Springerville-Alpine HPC – Mike Godwin
Payson Natural Resources Committee – Dave Daniels	Tucson HPC – Rana Tucker
Prescott HPC – Darren Tucker	Williams-Flagstaff HPDC – Tom Mackin
Show Low HPC – Paul Greer	Winslow HPC – Paul Greer
Safford HPC – Duane Aubuchon	

Agenda Review: Brian reviewed the agenda with the group.

Minutes for the last HPC meeting on February 2, 2014: The Commissioner asked for a motion to approve. The motion was made, carried and the minutes were approved as written.

NEPA Presentation – Anne Thomas, Forest NEPA Coordinator, Tonto National Forest

Anne's presentation, and the question and answer session following the slide show included an overview of the NEPA process, what steps may be involved, estimated timelines for completion, constraints, staffing and liability issues, variations in costs.

Arizona Wildlife Federation (AWF) Trophy Awards – Tom Mackin, AWF President

Tom Mackin conducted the AWF's annual awards presentation for the harvest of exceptional animals. Tom introduced AWF's Kim Kreuzer and explained how and why the AWF came to select this venue as a good place to present the awards, which included linking the hunter with the conservation work completed with hunter dollars. The request to hold the awards presentation here was made last year to former HPC Chairman Commissioner Kurt Davis, and Tom thanked Commissioner Harris for the opportunity. Tom commended the work of the agencies and volunteers, through the HPC process, and that habitat improvements benefit all wildlife species. He then explained the standards for the trophy awards and presented plaques for pronghorn, desert bighorn sheep, bison, and black bear.

Commissioner Harris thanked Tom and the AWF for their commitment to wildlife conservation. The trophy book is re-issued every 5 years, the next one will be the 2015 edition, which will also be a 50th Anniversary edition. The book will be available next year and can be purchased from the AWF or at AGFD offices.

2-Year Review of the Arizona HPC Charter – Review Comments and Finalize

Ruth Gregory distributed draft, marked-up copies of the charter to each representative of the local HPCs. The group took a few minutes to review the changes, which were mostly cosmetic. A section was added to describe the local HPC lead's role. A motion was made to approve the changes and the motion carried. The charter is now updated and finalized until the next regular review 2016 unless specific changes become necessary in the interim.

Update on Elk Project Funding – Brian Wakeling

Brian explained the results of the effort, which was initiated at the last HPC meeting in February 2014. It was proposed to commit a high balance of unobligated special elk tag funds to shovel-ready projects. Proponents, however, were not given clear direction by the Department about how to propose projects. Feedback from the 2 elk tag funding partners, Arizona Elk Society (AES) and Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF), indicated that a fully fleshed-out proposal on the HPC project proposal form was needed to make better-informed decisions on funding. Additionally, AES and RMEF priorities from the evaluations did not overlap, and neither of their priorities overlapped with the Department's priorities, so only one project (First Knoll Prescribed Burn) was funded for \$75,000. Brian explained that this does not mean the projects that weren't funded were rejected, but that the projects should be written up on HPC proposal forms and resubmitted as full proposals for the September 1 deadline. It is important that as much money as possible be obligated to projects each year, so that work gets done on the ground.

Wildlife Habitat Enhancement Initiative (WHEI) for Mule Deer and Quail – Brian Wakeling

Brian explained the funding for WHEI (Pittman-Robertson) and the budget of \$1 million per year for this year and the next 2 years, as well as how the target areas were identified. Pittman-Robertson (PR) funding has doubled in the last 3 years, but may only be a bubble. The Department's Wildlife Program Managers (WPMs) in its regional offices will be the leads on the process for getting this money on the ground. The WPMs positions will now be funded by PR and will allow them an increased level of involvement in the game program. The focus areas for this funding are Units 16A and 21 for mule deer habitat work and Units 28, 31, and 32 for scaled quail habitat work. If the funds, which must be spent by June 30, 2015 cannot be spent in target areas, other areas that have projects ready to go will be considered. Each area is currently working with a steering committee to identify and prioritize projects. The Department will be using existing agreements with WCO funding partners, and the objective is to see populations increase. \$400K is earmarked for each of the mule deer units and \$200K is budgeted for the quail areas. Projects need to be shovel ready, although these funds are eligible to be used for NEPA work. As the end of the fiscal year approaches, Ruth will be monitoring expenses and if it looks like there will be money that goes unspent, special tag expenditures will be moved to the federal funds. Increased populations, resulting in an increase mule deer permits will be the measure of success. Brian and Ruth went on to explain the processes that we are required to follow to get this money out the door, mainly securing agreements and the state procurement law we are required to follow. This led to a discussion of the administrative process, especially procurement that the Department is required to follow for any of its expenditures, including special tag funds. Ruth referred everyone to her column in the latest HPC newsletter which outlines the process. Because of fiscal year end purchasing deadlines, early completion of stewardship agreements and requisitions are essential to getting work on the ground. Work must be delivered by the end of the fiscal year. This is particularly vexing when trying to implement water tank clean outs in an effort to beat monsoonal rainfall. Paul Greer expressed kudos to Ruth for her assistance in this process last fiscal year.

Local HPC and Nongovernmental Organizations Reports and Success Stories

Bob Jacobs for the Mule Deer Foundation: Bob offered congratulations and appreciation for the work of State MDF Coordinator Terry Herndon (not present today) for his enthusiastic, hard work in establishing 21 MDF chapters in Arizona, and the increasing number of projects they are accomplishing.

Erin Butler for the Kingman HPC: They have been meeting with local ranchers. Three Music Mountains projects have been funded in previous years and are about to be contracted; other proposals for the Music Mountains are to follow. The WHEI will fund the sensors project in partnership with the Mohave County Flood Control District. The sensors are electronic gauges that measure both rainfall and the amount of water in catchments fitted with them. They are even programmed to send an email if the water levels fall below 6 inches. They can be installed on both collection point and apron systems. Joe Currie encouraged the regions to talk to their county flood control districts, because they also benefit from the information provided by these systems. They are quite an improvement for catchments located in remote areas, saving hundreds of human resource-hours by relieving the burden and personnel safety issues of the physical checks required to monitor waters.

Rana Tucker for the Tucson HPC: The Picacho water catchment restoration project was completed and was a great success in part due to help from volunteers from across the United States. The Catalina Bighorn Sheep Translocation project is also ongoing, and partially funded by Special Bighorn Sheep tag dollars through the HPC process.

Mike Godwin for the Springerville-Alpine HPC: The Buckelew prescribed burn is under way. The Dobson project is starting this month. The Springerville-Alpine HPC was used as outreach group for the translocation of bighorn sheep, relocated from near the Morenci copper mine to South Fork. Because of their local focus, the local HPCs can be an effective tool for outreach. The Unit 1 antelope collaring project is showing movements that were surprising. The Wallow Fire created meadows that pronghorn are now using. Mike was part of the San Juan fire tour with Senator Flake. It was noted that the intense fire dropped when it reached areas previously treated through HPC projects. This brought national attention to how wildlife projects have helped mitigate the intense damage caused by these fast-moving wild land fires. Firefighters were able to initiate their back burns in the wildlife project-treated areas. The Forest Service and the Department agree that this momentum needs to be sustained. There were also industry and livestock people on the tour, and it was noted how these projects have played a part in the creation of about 300 jobs in the White Mountains. Mike will write an article for the winter HPC newsletter.

Steve Rosenstock for the Arizona Strip Habitat Working Group: The re-formed group is enjoying excellent participation from landowners and permittees, NRCS, BLM, USFS. They are planning projects that leverage other funds. Little Springs trick tank is done; Steve thanked the Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society for their participation. The Unit 13A waters are out for contractor bids. The new Wildlife Managers are also participating as part of their training. They are seeing good buck to doe and fawn to doe ratios for pronghorn. Future plans include bighorn sheep translocations and disease monitoring.

Commissioner Harris announced that Steve Rosenstock was recently recognized by the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) as one of their 2 Wildlife Professionals of the Year, and offered congratulations.

Steve Clark for the Arizona Elk Society: Eighty-two AES volunteers removed 8 miles of fence at Burro Creek. They have been working closely with the Coconino National Forest, using hand crews and sawyers to treat 220 acres. Their Water for Wildlife HPC project resulted in the hauling of over 240,000 gallons of water. They also hired a contractor to repair USFS tanks - 3 in Unit 7 and 1 in Unit 22. They have a contractor in place for tank renovation next year and volunteers are working with scouts on a project today.

Tom Mackin for the Williams-Flagstaff HPC: Five of 6 tanks from the Units 5B and 6A HPC project have been cleaned. In all of Region 2, Coconino Sportsmen and Arizona Elk Society have conducted 35 visits to complete maintenance on 68 trick tanks. Rain has been spotty. The Pat Springs Pipeline on the Peaks is only flowing at 50% due to low snowpack last winter. This is the 17th year that volunteers have handled the operation and maintenance on the pipeline and its drinkers. They have also hauled water to some of the tanks. It's also been a challenging year in Unit 9 due to fires and vandalism. Region 2's Law Enforcement people are looking into it and could use feedback from anyone to report fence cuts, vandalism to waters, and similar damage. The reseals on old catchments in the Cinders area have reduced maintenance and all wildlife species are benefiting.

Ed Jahrke for AGFD Development Branch: They will be able to accomplish 20 projects this year due to WHEI and are leveraging other funding as well. Rains have come on schedule. Water hauling needs have dropped in last 2 weeks.

Joe Currie for AGFD Development Branch: Several catchments are underway or complete. HPC funding and NEPA drive the prioritization of projects.

Dave Daniels for the Payson Natural Resources Committee: Meeting attendance is good – 20+ people including a lot of ranchers. The Pleasant Valley Ranger District has no staff for clearances.

Brent Peterson for Mule Deer Foundation, North Valley chapter: They have a very active group and are working on a few projects in Unit 21 with Micah White and John Holbrook (Horseshoe Ranch permittee). Five water catchment projects are underway, and they have developed measures to monitor and maintain.

Darren Tucker for the Prescott HPC: The group is active and projects are underway. Of note is the Cellar Basin Trick Tank in Unit 20A, completed in coordination with the Mule Deer Foundation. It's a livestock catchment, but gets a lot of wildlife use. Darren offered thanks to the Maughan Ranches and its manager Don Glasgow and said it's important to remember how valuable the HPC process is in contributing to good landowner relations. Projects are also being implemented for Fort Rock Ranch access and on the Yavapai Ranch. The Central Arizona Grasslands Conservation Strategy implementation team is working on existing projects and identifying new ones. Mule Deer Foundation is very active in the area and just held a fundraising banquet for which they sold 180 tickets. They also took on 2 juniors hunt camps.

John Tuter for the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation: The Flagstaff Chapter's fundraiser is tonight. Banquets have been very successful. The RMEF Project Advisory Committee (PAC) recently earmarked \$170,000 for projects in Arizona and another \$30,000 for youth programs. The period to apply for the next round of PAC grants is March to May 2015.

Duane Aubuchon for the Safford HPC: HPC dollars have helped to fund prescribed burns taking place in the Galiuro Mountains and the Forest Service is waiting for other burn windows. Due to Mexican spotted owl occupancy in the Pinaleno Ecosystem Restoration Project, they must work during non-nesting periods (mostly winter). They continue to mark areas and Scott Lerich from National Wild Turkey Federation is in the process of securing contractors for treatment. The Noland Ranch project, featured in the latest HPC newsletter, was completed using drought relief funds as match. The Bonita grassland restoration is now up to 19 square miles. WHEI scaled quail dollars will be used to treat mesquite in the north Sulfur Springs Valley. The Safford HPC will resubmit the elk projects that were not funded, as well as proposals for new water developments. One success story is a Gould's turkey tag in the Galurios and a 35% increase in all turkey tags.

Paul Greer for the Show Low HPC: The Railroad Allotment project is done. Charlie Denton from the USFS is trying to get funds for arc surveys. Two HPC funded projects along with RMEF PAC grants, stimulus funds, and RAC grants resulted in the completion of 7 blocks of pinyon-juniper thinning, with 4,576 acres treated. Lakeside Ranger District has received funding for 2,000 acres of archaeological surveys and are moving forward, expecting implementation in 2015. Three permittees have completed the cleaning of 15 earthen tanks in Unit 3C. For the Woolhouse Wildlife Habitat Area in Unit 3B, NRCS EQIP funding grant started the project for 550 acres. Lakeside RD facilitated coordination with private companies and worked to leverage the original \$120,000 EQIP grant. The permittee can now use some of the funds to treat areas north of Highway 60. The target now is to treat 10,000 acres. Black Mesa Ranger District is in the process of maintenance burns in the Rodeo-Chediski burn area.

Paul Greer for the Winslow HPC: Ohaco Ranch did a couple small project through the USFS partners program. High Point and Ellsworth wells are still functioning, although costs for operation and maintenance are going up.

Predator control in Unit 4A has resulted in 100 additional adult pronghorn. Arc clearances are needed on several catchments and dirt tanks.

Glen Dickens for Arizona Antelope Foundation: The Unit 1 pronghorn collaring project has been successful in identifying where pronghorn are crossing Highway 260. Predator control and water projects are coming up in the Coronado National Forest, but they are understaffed to handle some of the compliance work. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) is pleased with AAF's performance report. AAF applied for an additional \$230,000 and was awarded. Bonita Grasslands – to date \$1.1 million has been spent. Pronghorn populations in Units 30A and 32 are up due to predator control. Units 35A and B predator control will take place for 1 more year. In the focus areas, surveys indicate 84 pronghorn, up from 33 in 2012. Expect it to be 100; the goal is 125 for the grant period. They are also seeing a variety of age classes in mule deer in the area. Glen complimented Terry Herndon and the MDF for their efforts in the area.

Stephen Williams for the Forage Resource Study Group: Stephen took a moment to compliment Brian Wakeling for his career with AGFD. The Bar T Bar and Hopi 3 Canyons Ranches are trying to equip some of their storage tanks and drinkers with water level sensors, as well as adding cameras for security purposes. The Flying M is doing agra-axe on juniper. June moisture monitoring indicates precipitation is not great, but is well timed.

Scott Fischer for the Southwest HPC: There is a summary of their projects in the [Summer 2014 HPC newsletter](#). Trigo pothole has had no precipitation, but has been hit hard by bighorn sheep. They recently installed a backup system at the site and moved the collection point, which helps to alleviate evaporation loss. Catchment #876, located on the border of Yuma Proving Grounds was also completed and mule deer were using it in a matter of days. This catchment replaces a system with high water hauling requirements. It has a capacity of 12,000 gallons and is intended to help keep deer out of agricultural fields. The Bob Achee catchment is collecting water and getting sheep use. Mohawk #1 in Unit 40B was completed with minimal human resources – 6 people in 4 hours. The new collection point is more efficient and has already filled the system. Southwest HPC will have several proposals for the upcoming cycle.

Chip Young, Arizona Game and Fish Department Landowner Relations Program: Chip offered appreciation to conservation groups including MDF and the Chandler Rod and Gun Club for their assistance in the Adopt a Ranch program.

Save the Dates

- **AGFD-WCO Project Funding Coordination meeting:** Saturday, January 3, 2015 at 8:00 AM – Phoenix Headquarters office.
- **Meet The Commission Meeting** – Saturday, January 17, 2015.
- **State HPC Meeting** – Saturday, January 24, 2015 at 8:00 AM – Phoenix Headquarters office.

The meeting adjourned at 1:00 PM.